intersection

CASE STUDIES FROM
PAYNE-LAKE COMMUNITY PARTNERS

APRIL, 2005

taking it to the street

how roadway design helped shape a neighborhood's development

by Tony Proscio

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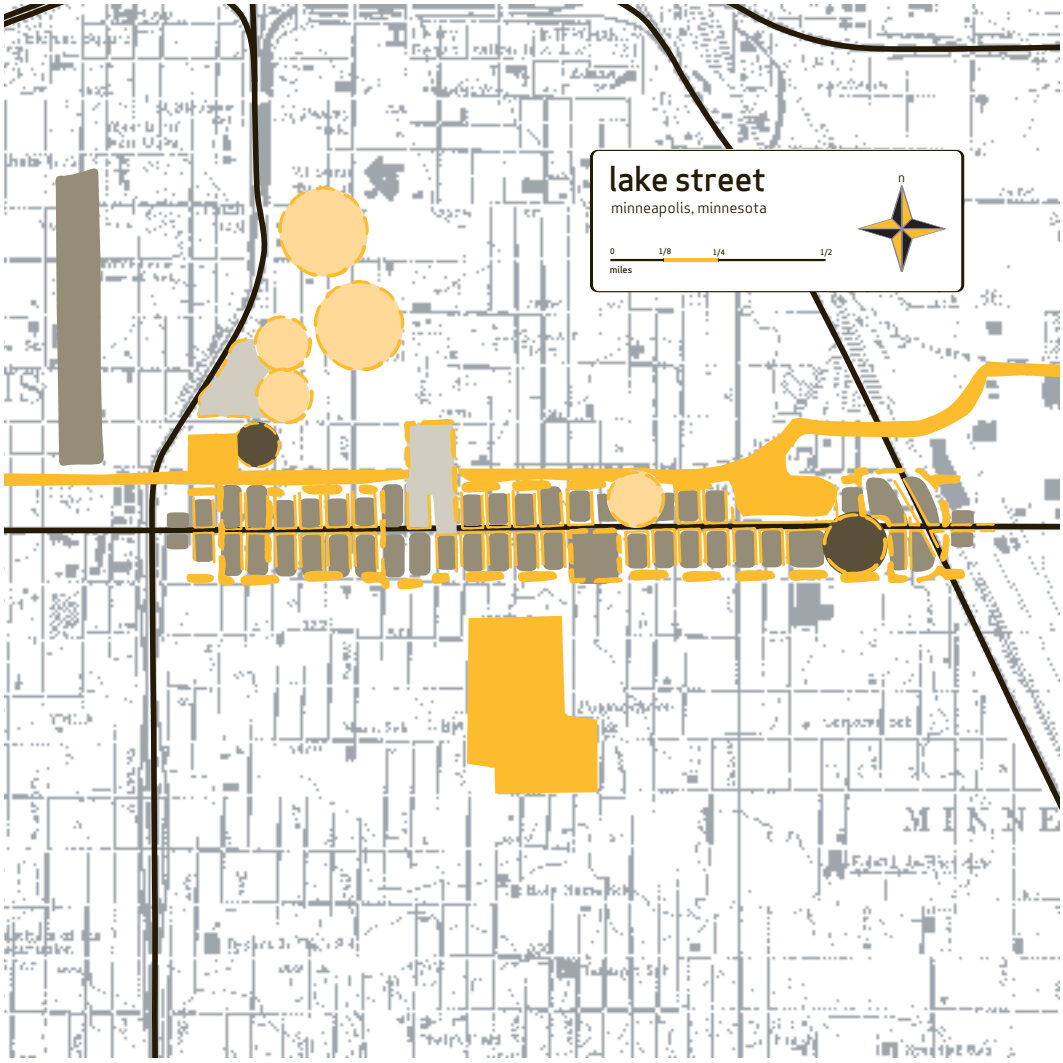

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES> YWCA, Colin Powell Youth Center

NATURAL SYSTEMS/GREEN SPACE> Midtown Greenway, Powderhorn Park, Pioneers and Soldiers Cemetery

COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION> Lake Street, Mercado Central, Nicollet Avenue, Chicago and Lake, Hiawatha and Lake, 4th and Lake

HOUSING> Portland Place, Phillips Park Housing Initiative, Joe Selvaggio Initiative, East Phillips Commons

JOB CREATION> Sears Site/Great Lakes Business Center, Wells Fargo Home Mortgage Headquarters

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Living Cities, a national investment collaborative of 15 major financial institutions, foundations, and government agencies, is committed to the revitalization of America's urban centers. Its mission is to focus knowledge, capacity, and investments to improve the lives of people in distressed urban neighborhoods. The collaborative invests in community development corporations, develops new urban revitalization models, and speaks out on urban policy issues. The McKnight Foundation has been a Living Cities member since 1994.

Four Living Cities members are testing new models of comprehensive neighborhood revitalization by aligning resources in new ways. These four Pilot Cities Initiatives—in Baltimore, Chicago, Miami, and Minneapolis/St. Paul—seek to increase both the scale and the impact of investments and are each led by a private foundation located in the city.

For more information see www.livingcities.org.

Payne-Lake Community Partners (PLCP) is the name of the Pilot Cities Initiative in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Its focus is two of the Twin Cities' most historic commercial and residential corridors: Payne Avenue in St. Paul and Lake Street in Minneapolis. New and established communities are bringing fresh energy and creating exciting

opportunities for shared wealth and prosperity in corridor neighborhoods that will be long-term social, economic, and cultural anchors. PLCP's agenda to connect people and place is to:

- Invest in the entrepreneurial energy of new immigrants and communities of color
- Accelerate the revitalization of two commercial corridors
- Expand the corridor markets into surrounding neighborhoods and the regional economy

PLCP is led by The McKnight Foundation in partnership with the Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the Neighborhood Development Center, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

This case study series is part of a commitment by Living Cities, The McKnight Foundation, and PLCP to create and share new knowledge about neighborhood and urban revitalization.

For more information see www.plcp.org.

THE McKNIGHT FOUNDATION

Founded in 1953 and endowed by William L. and Maude L. McKnight, the Foundation has assets of approximately $1.9 billion and granted about $85 million in 2004. Mr. McKnight was one of the early leaders of the 3M Company, although the Foundation is independent of 3M.

For more information see www.mcknight.org.

introduction

When you think of road design, the first thing that pops into your head probably isn't "philanthropic foundations." Most of us consider street design a public, not a private, concern. It's the responsibility of cities and counties, and we're happy to leave all that planning to their engineers and officials.

But we at The McKnight Foundation believe a broader view is both possible and desirable. Well-designed transportation systems, including roadways, are increasingly critical to this region's economic vitality and its residents' quality of life. That puts the question foursquare within the mission of a place-based family foundation like ours.

We annually dedicate more than 75 percent of our grant dollars to improving the quality of life in Minnesota. We hope to increase the likelihood that the investments our community makes in physical infrastructure, economic and social opportunity, and civic culture will pull in the same direction. Our internal organization reflects the same principle—our regional work braids together topics like regional growth management, open space protection, affordable housing, neighborhood vitality, and multimodal transportation.

This ambition is complex. It's hard enough to get transportation policy and practice right. It's even more difficult to integrate efforts across the walls that have traditionally segregated the work. We've accordingly had to search out approaches that break with customary foundation practice. One such approach is to jointly create, and then share, knowledge with nonprofits, citizens, public decision makers, and all the different sectors working on a particular issue. That's what this publication is all about. It summarizes what we've learned about planning the redesign of one of our region's most historic corridors—Lake Street in Minneapolis.

In early 2004, Hennepin County initiated a community planning process for the reconstruction of Lake Street, a county highway, to begin in 2005. As we at McKnight became more deeply involved in Payne-Lake Community Partners (PLCP) over the course of the year, we became more aware just how important Hennepin County's efforts would be to the future of the businesses and residents along the corridor. Two aspects stood out.

First, the expected upheaval of construction and reduced access over a long period of time would have a substantial effect on the fledgling businesses, often immigrant owned, that are bringing new life to Lake Street. We were eager to preserve the vitality of those businesses, whose success is so essential to the thoroughfare's future.

Second, the occasion of the new design for Lake Street gave the Foundation an excellent opportunity to explore the on-the-ground feasibility of pursuing a different approach to road construction. It was one thing to issue academic calls for an integrated, multimodal transportation system across the Twin Cities. It was quite another to envision that system in the context of actual traffic counts, bureaucratic momentum and inertia, and a resident engagement process. Such a wide-ranging project would embrace all the principles the Foundation's transportation program promotes: the provision of transportation choices; the creation of "livable" communities; the protection of air, water, and land.

Applying those principles to the Lake Street project means seeking more balance between the needs of people and the needs of cars. We wanted to make sure that encouraging shoppers to walk and use public transit would be given as high a priority as ensuring quick, smooth passage for cars. The need for convenient parking would be balanced against the need for turn lanes. Overall, we wanted community development and transportation to find common objectives and ways of working together.

As the weeks and months of roadway planning went on, we and our nonprofit and citizen partners didn't get everything we recommended, nor did anyone else. The final plan for Lake Street is, as it should be, a compromise. But we are certain that the community's voice made a difference for the better. And that difference is very important to the people who do business on and live near Lake Street.

Almost as important are the lessons we learned from the Lake Street experience, lessons that we think will be useful to community members, public officials, funders, and all those who value the public good wherever they live. That's the purpose of this report—to demonstrate how and why it's been worthwhile for a private foundation to pay attention to a major public street-paving project.

Rip Rapson
President, The McKnight Foundation

preface

THE VITALITY of a neighborhood street—measured by the number of people who use it; the number of different ways it is used; and the general feeling of variety and convenience it offers the users—is one of the surest indicators of neighborhood health. For community development organizers and planners, and for their constituents, a successful street may be as important as a successful building rehabilitation or economic development project. In fact, it may be a critical part of such projects.

Yet street design is not often a topic of much discussion in community development circles, or even of much awareness. Nor are roadway engineers and planners likely to be especially well acquainted with the needs and interests of neighborhood developers. Although road projects often feature some form of dialogue between planners and community leaders, these exercises tend to involve more information than consultation—that is, engineers present the alternatives they're considering, residents ask questions or make comments, and then the engineers do their best to incorporate those comments as they solve technical problems in traditional, technical ways. Actual influence by community residents is normally minimal, and the residents rarely have enough technical expertise at their disposal to make much difference in the way road work actually proceeds.

None of this is the result of negligence or ill will. It's most often a case of alien cultures—economic development and transportation planning—approaching a challenge that each side sees in different ways, and rarely finding much of a common language in which to discuss it.

The case presented here begins in exactly that way. Hennepin County, Minnesota, set out in the late 1990s to redesign and rebuild Lake Street, an important commercial thoroughfare in south Minneapolis. In doing so, the county was actually more attuned to economic development considerations than is typical elsewhere: the street was chosen for reconstruction partly because of its economic development importance; the exercise began with an expansive public "visioning" exercise that thoroughly blended transportation with other development concerns; and as engineers were

drawing up detailed plans, they met routinely with a Public Advisory Committee drawn from Lake Street residents and merchants. The county allocated an additional $4 million, beyond the normal budget for a project of this scope, specifically to provide for streetscape improvements.

Yet as the plans were nearing completion, it appeared that the result would be all too familiar. Most of the residents' suggestions and aspirations had run into the usual roadblocks in transportation planning: funding streams whose requirements were often at odds with one another and with community needs; traditional assumptions in roadway planning that favored traffic speed and convenience over sidewalks, trees, biking, and transit; and a community-participation process in which the community had to depend mostly on county staff and consultants for technical guidance. The guidance they received generally reflected more knowledge of traffic needs than of community planning and development. The result seemed to be a plan that promoted traffic speed at the expense of comfortable sidewalks, on-street parking, and other features that make a commercial district lively, attract customers, and create a sense of local vitality.

At this point, a new Twin Cities redevelopment project called Payne-Lake Community Partners was just getting underway. With support from the Minneapolis-based McKnight Foundation, along with several other national and local funders, the project had been organized in early 2004 to accelerate economic development along Lake Street and a corresponding corridor in St. Paul, Payne Avenue. The emerging plans for Lake Street reconstruction therefore raised a nearly immediate alarm among the Payne-Lake staff and funders. The problem, however, was that the process was far along and the time for influencing the outcome had become dangerously short. McKnight agreed to provide funding for a team of consultants who could offer a fresh perspective and to reach out to county and city planners with offers of last-minute suggestions. Thanks to a diplomatic approach and a team of consultants who were as steeped in roadway design as in community planning, the effort paid off. Although the resulting changes were far from radical, the consultants helped, as they put it, to "tweak" the plans in ways that promoted pedestrian use of the street, made space for sidewalk amenities and planting, and restored most of the curbside parking that the earlier plans had eliminated.

The details of these changes, which are described in this case study, help illustrate why street projects can be so crucial to community revitalization. But four general principles, which the consultants distilled after their work was complete, help put the Lake Street experience in a broader national context. Taken together, the case study and the consultants' conclusions offer both an encouraging example and a cautionary lesson to community developers in other places:

1. *Understand the role and character of the street in the context of the broader community.*

The main job of some streets is simply to move people along, from one remote place to another. But other streets mainly serve local users traveling short distances. Knowing which kind of street is being planned, and what other purposes a given street might have to serve, calls for a clear understanding of the wider community and not just of the road. Community representatives can be helpful in achieving that understanding, but only if they can have a genuine, informed exchange with transportation professionals.

2. *Challenge your assumptions.*

Many of the standard assumptions of roadway planning apply imperfectly, if at all, to the built environment of older urban neighborhoods. One example on Lake Street was the assumption that any road design always had to serve one overriding purpose: to minimize delays at every major intersection. In fact, on closer examination, it turned out to be possible to reach an approved level of flow across the whole street even while tolerating slight, episodic congestion at certain intersections. The benefit of that tolerance was considerable: wider sidewalks, on-street parking, and bus stops could then be preserved or enhanced, at minimal inconvenience to drivers. Until the assumptions were opened to question, those other features were considered expendable.

3. *Street reconstruction funds can work at cross purposes to neighborhood revitalization.*

The main sources of public funding for road improvements all come with restrictions on how the money can be used, toward what goals, with what results. The rules are different for virtually every program and level of government. Sometimes the rules are mutually contradictory. But even when they're not, they rarely fit the particular needs of redeveloping neighborhoods. Knowing when these rules can be waived or altered, and finding ways of funding things that the rules exclude, are prime challenges to road projects in urban environments. But they are not often among the top concerns of roadway engineers, who often find it challenging enough just to reconcile the conflicts between different funding sources, even for conventional purposes.

4. The design process must be grounded in the community's goals, and these goals must be represented by a strong community voice.

"Community participation" in street planning and design entails a difficult balancing act. Participants need to be drawn from a broad crosssection of the community, but they also need to be able to participate forcefully in very technical discussions. Equipping community advisers with independent expertise—that is, specialists who are not also working for the county—is one way of ensuring that kind of productive feedback. Another way is to include community development organizations, when available, as part of the public-participation system.

These four principles don't amount to a recipe for effective neighborhood street planning. If anything, they are a guide to some of the main dangers to avoid. But the fundamental lesson for transportation planners, community developers, and engineers is that there *is* no recipe, nor any single best approach, for planning a neighborhood commercial street. The process works best when it is custom tailored to each place with a high degree of flexibility, open discussion, creativity in blending funds, and an ability to analyze different kinds of needs from many perspectives.

taking it to the street

how roadway design helped shape a neighborhood's development
a case study

THE PURPOSE of community development, at least in concept, has always been to raise the overall quality of life in distressed places—not just the buildings or even just the economy, but as the name implies, the *community* of a place, the satisfactions it gives its residents and the invitation it extends to newcomers. A well-developed community, whether rich or poor, is one that offers a wide mix of necessities and pleasures, including attractive housing and viable businesses, but also safe streets; convenient shops and services; good schools; efficient transportation; and desirable places to play, walk, and gather.

> "A well-developed community, whether rich or poor, is one that offers a wide mix of necessities and pleasures."

Yet that expansive vision of community development has tended to be honored more in theory than in practice, primarily for one vexing reason: each of the key ingredients of community life tends to be governed by separate laws and authorities, paid for through separate and often irreconcilable budgets, designed and managed by different professional disciplines, and influenced by distinct theories and standards of practice enshrined over many years, largely in isolation from one another. To develop a vibrant community by altering all (or even many) of its relevant parts would demand skills of Renaissance proportions. It would mean enlisting the

cooperation of dozens of government systems and agencies whose relationship to one another is at best wary and more often nonexistent.

As a result, the great majority of community organizations have, for most of their history, zeroed in on one or two local concerns, often housing or other real estate, and ventured into other areas only in response to unusual opportunity or necessity. The resulting accomplishments in real estate alone have been no small feat. Housing and commercial redevelopment, after all, present their own thicket of competing authorities, disjointed funding streams, and professional rivalries. For decades, many observers of community development believed that the skills necessary to navigate just this one feature of urban life would be too great for any but the most gifted local leaders to muster. After a couple of decades of experience, the real estate challenge has proved less daunting than these skeptics initially believed, but it has never become easy.[1]

Yet there is a broad expanse of opportunity lying between the ideal form of community development, in which every relevant factor is integrated with every other one, and the most rudimentary form, in which community groups tend to housing and leave the other elements to market forces or intervention by other players. As housing values in many neighborhoods have begun to rise, placing less of a burden on local government and community groups to stoke the residential market, local

leaders have increasingly found at least some additional areas where joint planning and cooperation are becoming possible—and often necessary. In more and more places, parks and playgrounds, child care and education, and employment and youth development have, one by one, been integrated into the community development process. Even if this list still falls short of a complete inventory of all the elements of neighborhood quality, the circle of activity and creativity is unquestionably widening.

The redesign of Lake Street, a prominent commercial corridor in south Minneapolis, provides one example of this kind of expansion, but of a kind not often seen in other places. On the most obvious level, the Lake Street story is noteworthy because it addresses two crucial elements of neighborhood life that few community developers ever have a chance to influence on any large scale: street design and transportation planning. That alone is a giant step, crossing the fiscal, political, and professional boundaries that have tended to wall off roadway engineering from the influence of neighborhood organizations. But more profoundly, the case of Lake Street represents an approach to community development that even in theory has rarely appeared front-and-center in the calculation of what makes a successful, desirable neighborhood. More often than not, community developers have viewed roads and transit lines as a given—an esoteric specialty best left to professionals, or an all-but-immovable feature around which neighborhood development must try to navigate. And they have usually been right.

In the case of Lake Street, however, the design and purpose of the road itself were opened for re-imagination, in a process that started with a broad invitation to residents to participate in the planning. Or to be more precise, they were opened a bit—and in later phases of its planning and reconstruction may be opened further. How this happened, and what it made possible, are the subject of most of this case study. But before the events and lessons are examined, it is important to have a clear understanding of why the design of this or any other commercial street is so important to the quality of neighborhood life.

"In the case of Lake Street, the design and purpose of the road itself were opened for re-imagination."

a once-in-50-years opportunity

For most of Minneapolis' history, Lake Street has been a critically important east-west thoroughfare, both a key route across several neighborhoods of the city's south quadrant and the commercial heart of most of the neighborhoods it crosses. Although parts of Lake have struggled through difficult economic times in recent decades, it remains one of the city's busiest bus routes and a prime locus of commercial investment and revitalization for the neighborhoods along its path.

In a central 1.8-mile segment of Lake Street, where most of the events in this case study are concentrated, the past five years have seen an explosion of new, immigrant-owned small businesses. Most of the nearly 300 percent growth has come from Latino business owners, but a good many are Somali, with a smattering of other ethnic groups. This rapid increase in business activity has partly been a side effect of recent waves of immigration into Minneapolis, but the exceptional concentration on this one part of Lake Street is no accident. At the eastern end of this

zone is a new light-rail station, which opened in 2004, a few steps from a YWCA (see map for details). Roughly a dozen blocks to the west is the five-year-old Mercado Central, a member-owned cooperative of Latino businesses sponsored partly by community development groups. Across the street is a nonprofit theater, the neighborhood's cultural anchor. Near the Mercado Central and another dozen blocks westward, just north of Lake, are pockets of new housing, both market rate and subsidized, along with a regional hospital and the national headquarters of a major mortgage lender. Together, the housing, the crowd-drawing activity at either end of the road, and the Mercado in the middle generate a flow of pedestrians that serves the many smaller storefronts in between.

> "The new businesses constitute a powerful ingredient of any redevelopment plan."

In short, this portion of Lake Street is going through a burst of new enterprise, at levels not seen for decades and in a concentration that holds tremendous promise for the surrounding neighborhood. Although many of the new businesses are thinly capitalized and still fragile, they constitute a powerful ingredient of any redevelopment plan. Besides providing conveniences for residents, they are a magnet for pedestrian traffic—probably the single surest way of reducing crime, as well as a means to collect a critical mass of customers to fuel yet more businesses.

The vitality of a commercial strip—as measured in the number of businesses operating there, the number of people on the street, and the amount of time people spend shopping—is one of the most reliable indicators of overall neighborhood health. It not only provides a good index of the value that residents derive from the neighborhood, but it yields measurable, psychological benefits: residents see busy shops and sidewalks as a sign that other people consider the street and neighborhood desirable, a perception that reinforces their own assessment of it.

When a major redesign of Lake Street came up for consideration in the late 1990s, as part of a planned "Midtown Greenway Corridor," Hennepin County commissioners described it as the kind of opportunity that comes only once in 50 years—a chance to link neighborhood revitalization with roadway improvements so that each reinforces the other. The proposed Greenway Corridor was to include newly landscaped walking and bike paths along a disused portion of a railroad line, new mass transit on the remaining portion, vest-pocket parks, overlooks, and more inviting sidewalks. Along the street, parking and storefronts would be redesigned so that front doors and windows would line the sidewalks, and off-street parking and service entrances would be at the rear. The combined aesthetic, pedestrian, and economic effect of all these changes would be an enormous boost to both economic vitality and the local quality of life. The expansive vision was formalized in a "Framework Plan" assembled and published in October 1999.

The "Framework Plan" for Lake Street was the fruit of a broad consultative process involving residents, business people, and community organizations along the whole length of the street, as well as the county transportation planners and their consultants. It produced what virtually everyone considered an ambitious vision, for which complete funding was then little more than a distant prospect. Still, it formed the basis on which Hennepin County set its priorities for redeveloping the corridor, including a special appropriation of county and federal dollars specifically for roadside enhancements.[2] As a result, plans for the street and its environs would be based primarily on the Framework's vision and the surrounding communities' general needs, not solely on the calculus of traffic planning. Or so it seemed.

the road—and cars—take center stage

Just over four years passed between the completion of the Framework Plan and Hennepin County's announcement that the reconstruction of Lake Street would begin in 2005. Construction would start with a four-mile stretch of roadway and cost a total of $25 million. Its first phase would be a 23-block-long segment that includes virtually all the new centers of social and commercial activity described earlier: the Y, the theater, the Mercado Central, the new and renovated housing, and the hospital. In the intervening years, in fact, this list of concentrated assets acquired one striking addition: a long-vacant department store, a warehouse, and a parking lot were beginning to be converted into a mixed-use project including 60,000 square feet acquired by a community development partnership that is creating the Midtown Global Market, modeled partly on Seattle's Pike Place Market. The site will also feature affordable and market-rate housing; the headquarters of a health care company, which owns the nearby hospital; and a hotel to serve hospital patients and their families. From the perspective of all this economic development activity, the redesign of the road could not have been more timely.

Yet in those same four years, the Framework Plan's expansive vision for Lake Street had narrowed considerably. What had begun as an overall strategic approach to the street's commercial districts and surrounding neighborhoods had, little by little, come to focus tightly (and traditionally) on traffic alone—that is, on design features like dedicated turn lanes and uniformly wide driving lanes, whose primary purpose was to speed the flow of cars across town. Planning consultants, reviewing this slow change of vision after the fact, summed up the metamorphosis this way: "As the planning proceeded, it became clear that the street reconstruction project was taking a more traditional 'how do we solve traffic problems?' approach, rather than a 'how does street design help revitalize community?' approach." [3] To make matters worse, the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and the State of Minnesota were simultaneously conducting a separate roadway project, creating an interchange on Interstate 35 at the western edge of the Lake Street target area. As matters were progressing, the result would be a widened and busier roadway on which traffic delays would be minimized—but so would sidewalk space, pedestrian conveniences,

on-street parking, tranquility, and to some degree, safety—in short, all the things that mattered to Lake Street's businesses and residents.

In 2003, as the construction planning was moving toward completion and details were beginning to surface in public, The McKnight Foundation grew concerned about the possible effects of major roadway construction on Lake Street's fledgling businesses. The Foundation had a particular interest in what happened on Lake. McKnight was not only a prime funder of the Framework's initial planning process, but also the leader in the formation of an intensive, decade-long redevelopment effort along two commercial corridors in the Twin Cities: Payne Avenue in St. Paul and, in Minneapolis, Lake Street. The project, part of a national initiative started by the community development funding collaborative Living Cities, would become a multimillion-dollar program of concentrated investments and resident and entrepreneur empowerment, involving some 10 to 15 community organizations along both roads. Today known as Payne-Lake Community Partners, the undertaking was at that point just under a year away from its formal inauguration, with significant backing from the McKnight, Rockefeller, and John S. and James L. Knight foundations and the St. Paul Travelers insurance company. In short, McKnight had a considerable stake in the quality of roadway design and construction on Lake—a stake that went beyond a foundation's normal interest in the success of public services in its community.

To test its concerns about the emerging design plans, McKnight turned to the Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit planning and design firm that specializes in "creating and sustaining public places that build communities."[4] After reviewing the county's draft plans, PPS drew three discouraging conclusions:

First, the designs had been heavily influenced—in fact, all but predetermined—by projections of future traffic on the street. Such projections can be highly speculative, but they have a self-fulfilling quality, especially when they lead planners to create wider streets and faster driving times. Second, planners had treated the whole stretch of Lake Street uniformly, without making much provision for varying levels of traffic along the route or different types and degrees of development from place to place. Third, as a result of both these factors, planners had made lanes wider and created separate turn lanes to help speed traffic along the road. The result was not only a near certainty of faster traffic, with its attendant dangers, but a net loss of scarce parking and sidewalk space, which had to be sacrificed to make room for the extra, wider lanes.

"The challenge of redesign was to rank the many opportunities and demands on Lake Street."

Built in a time when automobiles were less common, Lake was not a wide street to begin with—just 80 feet separate any given shopfront from its neighbor across the street—so sidewalks were already narrow, with little flexibility for planting, benches, or other amenities that encourage pedestrians to wander and shop. Every improvement, in such a constricted space, would inevitably be "borrowed" from the space available for some other desirable feature: trees or benches would mean less space for pedestrians; wider sidewalks would mean less space for cars; wider driving lanes or sidewalks would lead to narrower or eliminated parking lanes. The challenge of redesign, in short, was to rank the many opportunities and demands on Lake

Street—both those related to transportation and those related to economic and neighborhood vitality—and make painful choices among them.

When the situation was viewed that way, it was not clear that all the planners' extra lane width and additional left-turn lanes were really necessary. In several places, it seemed, the additions would improve traffic flow by only a few minutes, and only during a few busy hours each day. Yet the corresponding loss to pedestrian convenience and the neighborhood shopping environment would be full time and irreparable. With too little geometric flexibility from place to place, the plans imposed a uniform width, look, and feel on the whole street, even though the levels of benefit and harm from the design varied considerably from place to place. Project for Public Spaces also noted that the county plans hadn't taken much account of what's commonly called multimodal transport: planning that encourages people to move from one form of transportation to another—from their car to transit to walking or biking—rather than automatically driving to every destination.

As an alternative, PPS staff members suggested a more varied design with wider sidewalks and narrower car lanes and more comfortable provision for transit, biking, and parking. Such a design, they argued, should incorporate "place-making" elements along the way—that is, streetscaping, pedestrian amenities, and flashes of design that would give the various parts of the road a distinctive character, as well as respond to the very different needs of each segment.

late entry into a complex process

For McKnight and its allies in Payne-Lake Community Partners, the PPS report raised an immediate alarm, but it also posed a diplomatic and political problem of uncertain proportions. The county planners had been at work for years, and they had been neither secretive nor unthoughtful. From the beginning, Hennepin County had convened a Public Advisory Committee for Lake Street that met regularly with county staff and consultants to vet ideas and offer suggestions. The City of Minneapolis, despite having little formal authority over the redesign, was welcomed as a reviewer and commenter. By the standards of most highway-planning exercises, the process that

county officials created had been unusually open and consultative. Those same officials would surely be surprised (to say the least) by the suggestion that a private foundation now needed to step in and suddenly right a faulty exercise.

Still, there were legitimate reasons, and some remaining time, to reconsider both the process and its results. For one thing, the Public Advisory Committee consisted almost entirely of lay people, who had necessarily depended on county staff and consultants for information about what would be feasible and permissible. By all reports, in responding to the members' ideas or questions, county staff had consistently given solid professional advice. But they were nonetheless highway planners, not authorities on community economic development. Their training, the principal tools of their profession, and the legal mandates under which they operated all placed the highest priority on smoothing the flow of cars, not on drawing pedestrians onto sidewalks and into shops, and not on creating amenities to fuel neighborhood revitalization. Even with the greatest commitment to the public-consultation process, highway professionals may not have been fully open to ideas whose primary benefits would lie outside the roadway. And they may not have been aware of options for bending the complex rules governing public transportation budgets.

Those rules did, to be sure, pose serious obstacles to carrying out the kind of broad, integrated design that had gone into the Framework Plan. For example, federal and state money raised through gasoline taxes can legally be used only for "highway purposes," meaning that sidewalk amenities, bike paths, and other non-traffic considerations are harder, though not impossible, to pay for. Another example: Minnesota's state grants for roadways arrive tightly wrapped in detailed design requirements, including lane widths and rules for forecasting traffic volume. Still, some of these provisions can be adjusted for special cases. The process for doing so is rarely easy or certain to succeed. Whether the advisory committee was fully aware of the possibility of such variances, or whether members were encouraged to think outside the normal restrictions, is doubtful.

Whatever the reasons, the committee and the county planners had arrived at a number of decisions that were unlikely to contribute to community and economic development along Lake Street. That posed a critical setback to the many efforts by the City of Minneapolis, national and local foundations, and community organizations to revitalize the surrounding neighborhoods. It also led to some degree of frustration, even cynicism, among some members of the advisory committee, who began to feel that the ideas they valued most for their neighborhood inevitably ran, one by one, into a brick wall of regulatory or technical objections. Yet the county had hardly drawn up the plans in bad faith, or closed its process to constructive comment. The residents were promised an open process in which they would have many opportunities to voice their opinions, and that is largely what the county delivered. So how would it look for The McKnight Foundation, with its perceived wealth and autonomy, to step into the process at such a late stage and begin second-guessing years of effort by planners, consultants, and public advisers?

technical adjustments with wider implications

With little more than a year remaining until the county's planned start of work on Lake Street, the Foundation ruled out pressing for a complete overhaul of the plans. Both practical and diplomatic considerations argued for some kind of negotiated

compromise, starting with a cooperative review in which county and city officials and community representatives would be fully involved. The Foundation started by retaining three consultants—Fred Dock, Stacy Becker, and Charleen Zimmer—to work with government planners to find opportunities for what the consultants later described as "tweaks": changes that would "make the design more community sensitive" and "steer it toward outcomes geared more toward community revitalization and less toward moving traffic."

The process for doing this was to work with the City of Minneapolis and the Hennepin County project planners in two ways: (1) in a facilitated session to address potential design opportunities, and (2) to participate in regularly scheduled community design meetings. The facilitated session was designed, organized, and led by the consultant team with input and participation from city officials and planners and county officials and design team members.

Government officials, understandably, were at first wary of all this new interest. Yet to the Foundation's and consultants' credit, the relationship warmed fairly quickly. Representatives of the city were among the most amenable to the late-stage review, given that their formal role in the process had never been great, and that much of the early planning had taken place during a mayoral transition, when many city offices were temporarily vacant or changing tenants. Participants from the county may have been a little more skeptical, as were some members of the Public Advisory Committee. But little by little, committee members began turning to the consultants with questions about the plan and possible alternatives. Renewed interest and fresh suggestions from the committee, combined with flexibility and diplomacy from the consultants, gradually led to a greater openness among county planners to new ideas. From there, the pace of deliberations quickly accelerated.

> "Both practical and diplomatic considerations argued for some kind of negotiated compromise."

After roughly six months, the various meetings and design sessions led to agreement on five critical changes in the plan's underlying assumptions—changes that echoed much of the initial critique by the Project for Public Spaces:

- Turn lanes are unimportant and should be used only in critical locations, particularly those where congestion would otherwise create serious traffic hazards.

- Design features should be varied and mixed along Lake Street, according to the particular needs of different parts of the street.

- Traffic analysis should look at how well traffic flows across the whole corridor, rather than try to minimize traffic slowdowns at every separate intersection.

- Parking solutions need to look beyond on-street parking alone.

- Flexibility needs to be a core feature of the design so that future planners have as much latitude as possible to meet unforeseen needs—especially given that different design elements have different life spans.

The seemingly technical nature of these points can be deceptive. Because they came late in the process, they will result in changes to the current plans that are far from revolutionary. As a result of the first point, for example, a few of the planned turn lanes will be eliminated—not a radical step on paper, but eliminating the turn lanes frees up space for sidewalks and parking, which merchants consider crucial to their success. Yet quite apart from the consequences of each separate idea, when taken together the new principles lead to a profoundly different approach to the street and its surroundings. That approach may, in future stages of construction, have wider implications for both traffic and development.

What the revised principles describe—a street with varying configurations and design features, with on-street parking in some places and expanded sidewalks in others, where automobile speed is compromised at some sections for the sake of sidewalks or parking, but where the overall flow of traffic remains at acceptable levels—is

starkly different from the assumptions that have traditionally governed roadway planning in the Twin Cities and elsewhere. Even so, the new approach is not unprecedented. A similar flexibility came to shape a roadway redesign plan in Palo Alto, California, along the busy state highway called El Camino Real.

As eventually happened on Lake Street, planners in Palo Alto ended up striking a careful and varying balance along El Camino Real among the needs of long-distance drivers, local shoppers and pedestrians, bicyclists, and residents taking short trips within their neighborhood. Because El Camino Real is both a major commuting thoroughfare and a commercial "Main Street" within Palo Alto, the regional desire for a wide, fast street was fundamentally at odds with the local need for calm traffic, sidewalk landscaping, pedestrian safety, and easy stop-and-shop opportunities.

The solution in Palo Alto was in essence the same one that the consultants eventually struck on Lake: a hybrid street that varied (in El Camino Real's case) from four lanes wide on about one-quarter of the street to five and six lanes elsewhere. (Lake is primarily a four-lane road, but the planned turn lanes would have expanded it to five, and the lanes were to have been widened.) In the redesign of El Camino Real, the narrowing of some segments of the street made room for wider sidewalks, on-street parking, safer crosswalks, or some combination of these.

But planners in Palo Alto ran into a key problem that also arose in Minneapolis: at the specific points where the road would narrow, traffic flow would not be as smooth as federal funding rules demanded. To solve that problem, consultants showed that the total travel time over the whole length of the corridor was still acceptable, even if traffic slowed in a few spots. Tolerating some localized delay, in the interest of economic development at those intersections, turned out to be a small price to pay. It amounted to no more than three minutes' additional travel time for drivers moving along the whole street. By measuring traffic in this way, the plan met federal guidelines and still satisfied the differing needs of the street's various segments.

In the case of Lake Street, there was yet another reason that a slight slowing of through traffic would not be a grave loss to drivers: the road had become less

important as a regional through street, and was more commonly used for local drives within or between adjoining neighborhoods. That historical change in how the road was used had important ramifications for both transportation planning and community development. If Lake Street was again to become the regional shopping destination that it had been in years past—an important goal of both the local merchants and Payne-Lake Community Partners—the street would need to remain inviting for local, short-trip drivers and pedestrians. From that perspective, rebuilding Lake as a regional thoroughfare, and maximizing the speed and efficiency of traffic whizzing through the neighborhood, would be seriously counterproductive. The consultants' reflection on these points is worth quoting at length:

"The street-design process is typically driven by the traffic needs of the street. 'Needs' are established by forecasting future traffic volumes (demand) and then comparing those forecasts to street capacity by looking at the amount of time vehicles are delayed at intersections (the Level of Service) or how freely vehicles can travel. This process tends to favor making changes that improve vehicle operations, oftentimes neglecting other transportation modes or the impact on the character of the adjacent area. The aggregate effect of these types of changes is the 'wider, faster' version of a street that reduces travel time over long distances. …

"As the regional role of Lake Street has diminished since the 1960s, commuter trips along the length of Lake Street have been replaced with destination trips to specific points on Lake Street, which tend to be economic and community focal points that have a lot of 'people activity.' *Thus the traffic volumes may be the same as in the past, but the trips that make up the car counts are very different.* It is this difference that must enter into the analysis of the role and character of the street. ...

"When most trips on a street are of the end-to-end commute variety, the street functions more as one long continuous corridor. In that context, a faster trip over a long distance is important to the users of the street. However, if you use only a short segment of the street in your trip, the amount of benefit you perceive from your time on the street may be negligible. Thus it is important to know if a street functions as a series of connected segments with community-based nodes, rather than as a long corridor. ... [Changing the view of the street] leads to different decisions about how to organize and access parking and transit, how to organize pedestrian space, and how to accommodate access to land use."

> "Now and then, the barriers between transportation and community have been known to crumble."

The significance of these ideas transcends the technical world of transportation planning. Creating "economic and community focal points that have a lot of 'people activity' " is a crucial preoccupation—some might argue the central preoccupation—of neighborhood development. "Connected segments with community-based nodes" is a professional's way of describing the kind of population magnets that draw people from one part of a neighborhood to another and that generate business, social interaction, and neighborhood vitality.

Creating such nodes and focal points—a goal more technically known as "place making"—is as much art as science. It entails a partly alchemical mixture of economics, aesthetics, engineering, and psychology, in which the condition, size, and arrangement of buildings and pavement are just one part of a more complex undertaking: establishing an attractive mood and feel that blend sidewalk ambience; the shopper's feeling of safety and welcome; and the perceived ease of driving, walking, or biking to any given part of the road. Merchants, when choosing a place to set up shop, make such judgments all the time, whether by calculation or by intuition. So, in a different way, do families picking a place to live. Community developers, to have any hope of success, therefore have no choice but to mirror those same calculations in their revitalization plans, by creating the hospitable ambience that businesses and their customers demand.

Transportation planners, however, have traditionally faced much less of that kind of pressure. Their constituency, so to speak, has been the automobile or, in certain cases, the transit rider. Moving people efficiently in and out of places, or through them, is typically the transportation official's primary mandate. Creating a pleasing experience within these places has most often been considered the responsibility of other people, especially community and economic development agencies. Yet now and then, the barriers between transportation and community planning have been known to crumble. At least in some places, community leaders and transportation planners have begun to discover that each of them has a stake in the other's success, and that the meaning of success is not one that either side can define on its own.

transportation meets community development: a landmark case

In one recent and increasingly celebrated instance, the two professional subcultures forged a slow, sometimes difficult, but ultimately groundbreaking alliance around what eventually became a nationally recognized revitalization project—one that neither side could have accomplished on its own. In the Fruitvale district of Oakland, California, just southeast of downtown, a community development organization

called the Unity Council and the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system initially found themselves at odds in 1991 over what had started out as nothing more than a concrete parking garage. Although the neighborhood was starved for parking, local businesses and residents almost instantly disliked the proposed BART parking structure—for reasons that would surely sound familiar, leaping across a dozen years and 2,000 miles, to the businesses and residents of Lake Street.

BART planners had envisioned the multistory garage primarily as a way of getting vehicles in and out of the rapid-transit station efficiently. The goal was to let commuters move easily from their cars to the train, and vice versa, and be quickly on their way. But struggling businesses around the station, whose hopes of survival depended mightily on trade from those same BART riders, had much less interest in speeding people in and out. In their view, the fortress-like garage and its hermetically sealed connection to the station would only alienate commuters from the neighborhood. It would concentrate air pollution in the commercial district, create blind areas ideal for gangs and crime, and add one more eyesore to an already distressed physical environment. In short, the structure would be great for automobiles, but it would severely diminish, and in some ways eliminate, the transit stop's value to the area's economic and community development.

> "The Lake Street redesign may have important lessons that apply to the great mass of commercial streets."

As on Lake Street, the planners weren't trying to be unhelpful. They were thinking about efficient movement—about cars and trains and speed—not about stores, sidewalks, and neighborhoods.

Fruitvale in 1991 and the Lake Street community in 2004 had a couple of things in common besides a brewing battle over transportation. One was an increasingly

immigrant population—a concentration of Latino residents and business owners, with a large minority of Asians and Pacific Islanders. Thanks to years of organizing by the Unity Council, these groups were readily mobilized, keenly aware of regional and city plans for their neighborhood, and particularly alert to the effect that government projects could have on their businesses, homes, and neighborhood. Still, they were far from experts on transportation planning, and their grasp of BART's world, with its tangle of financial, technical, and regulatory demands, was weak at best.

The other resemblance between Fruitvale and Lake Street was the ready source of technical and financial support from foundations, government, and national community development institutions. As later happened on Lake, community leaders in Oakland could tap such sources for help in reviewing and commenting on plans, formulating alternative ideas, and assembling development projects consistent with the newly formulated vision.

In Fruitvale, the result of these factors, and of the nearly eight years of planning and negotiations with BART and other government agencies that ensued, is now a $100 million Transit Village, a mixed-use development that integrates transit and parking with an elaborate shopping, restaurant, and office plaza; subsidized and market-rate housing; a clinic; a child-care center; and a public library. All of it is governed by a

unifying design whose arrangement of parking, plaza, and shops encourages precisely the kind of multimodal planning that seemed lacking, at first, in the Lake Street plan. Surrounded by the new Transit Village, BART riders have every reason to spend time in the area—for example, using services like child care and medical facilities, or walking from restaurants to shops—between riding the train and heading for their cars, bikes, or homes.

Projects like the Fruitvale Transit Village have been widely publicized and studied in recent years, under the general heading of "transit-oriented design." In "transit-oriented" projects, whole redevelopment plans are anchored on a rail stop or intermodal hub, usually with multiple benefits for both the neighborhood and the transit system. The participation of community and nonprofit organizations in these transit-oriented exercises has often been crucial in forcing the design to serve the broader interests of the surrounding neighborhood. Examples like Fruitvale can therefore be promising precedents for drawing attention to the development potential of a major public transportation center and encouraging joint planning for transportation and community revitalization.

Yet ordinary commercial thoroughfares like Lake Street—neighborhood shopping areas where driving and walking are still the main forms of transportation—present a

less dramatic, more typical, but arguably more difficult challenge. Perhaps it is the very ordinariness of these circumstances that causes them to be less thoroughly explored and studied. In arrangements like Lake Street's, mass transit may be one element of the local traffic patterns, but it is not the main population magnet. Unlike Fruitvale's BART stop, the light-rail station on Lake would not, by itself, ever be likely to drive the overall development of the street. On Lake Street, large economic development projects like the Global Market will have at least as much influence as transit on where shoppers and residents congregate and how they spend their time in the area. Perhaps most influential of all will be the design of the actual *street*: its perceived safety and convenience; the room it leaves for pedestrians and amenities; and the ease with which it lets visitors enter the neighborhood, park, and shop.

For that reason, experiences like the Midtown Greenway Corridor Framework Plan and the Lake Street redesign deserve close attention as examples of how to integrate transportation plans into the wider framework of community and economic development—even when a major transit center doesn't supply a unique and obvious focal point. The achievements thus far on Lake Street, although far less sweeping than those in Fruitvale, may have important lessons to offer redeveloping neighborhoods across the country, precisely because those lessons apply to the great mass of commercial streets where most consumers don't automatically arrive by public transportation, but must drive, walk, or otherwise choose to be there.

improvements to the lake street plan: three particulars

Among the "tweaks" that the consultants negotiated in the redesign of Lake Street, three elements illustrate the effect that roadway features can have on the prospects for economic and community development nearby. All three of these examples flow directly from the principles described earlier. But each of them provides an opportunity to see those principles—and by extension, the development effects of roadway planning—in action. The three are narrower lane widths, variable sidewalk widths, and preservation of on-street parking.

THE WIDTH OF DRIVING LANES in Minnesota is normally determined by government funding requirements, which are in turn based on formulas balancing speed and safety that are widely accepted in professional practice. Width requirements are therefore among the more basic and inflexible considerations in street planning. Yet a seemingly minor change in the way lane widths were measured on Lake Street—basing the measurement on meters instead of feet—narrowed the driving lanes just enough to yield a little extra space on either side of the road without running afoul of the regulations. This approach was first identified by Hennepin County staff on another road project in Minneapolis (West Broadway) and eventually used on Lake Street as the basis for a variance from state-aid requirements.

In the tight confines of Lake Street, every foot of flexible space is precious. As the Project for Public Spaces pointed out in its critique of the initial Lake Street plan, "sidewalks are only about 10 feet wide as it is—barely wide enough for street trees and clear walking space of eight feet for pedestrians." [5] The seemingly technical change from English to metric units resulted in driving lanes that were only a bit narrower, but the cumulative effect, across four lanes, ended up yielding six inches of additional sidewalk on either side of the road. Retaining parking lanes in lieu of a center turn lane resulted in another foot of sidewalk space on either side of the roadway. Adding 1 ft. of sidewalk constitutes an increase in pedestrian space of more than 10 percent—wide enough, at a minimum, to reduce the sense of crowding on the sidewalks and, in some spots, to make an easier accommodation for sidewalk amenities and planting.

SIDEWALKS can be extended beyond this small increase only at the cost of other roadway space like curbside parking, bike lanes, or bus stops. None of these are easy trade-offs, so the prospects for trees, kiosks, benches, and gathering places will always be limited. Yet the revised principles now allow for occasional sidewalk "bump-outs"—brief stretches near intersections where sidewalks extend into what would otherwise have been a parking or bus-stop lane. Together with the extra foot and a half of walking space, the bump-outs can provide at least periodic relief from the feeling of a crowded, spare walkway. They allow space for pedestrians to gather before crossing the street, and they can provide room for planting, vending machines,

or other optional amenities. In the revised Lake Street plan, 11 intersections now have portions of the sidewalk that widen near the corners, an enhancement to both the safety and the aesthetics of these crossing spots.

ON-STREET PARKING had been steeply reduced in the original Lake Street redesign to accommodate left-turn lanes—a move that caused particular anxiety among merchants along the street. Yet as the Project for Public Spaces pointed out, "Curbside parking is more than a vehicle function: It provides a physical and psychological buffer between pedestrian and moving traffic. It is also critical to the perception of a neighborhood shopping district as being convenient." In the initial plan, the 1.8-mile section of Lake Street was to lose some 65 on-street parking spaces—30 percent of the total—largely to make room for left-turn lanes, and because planners had conducted a study showing that the current spaces were underused. (The study did not cover the whole section of the street being redesigned, and unlike the traffic-flow analysis, it did not project future demand.)

> "Curbside parking is critical to the perception of a neighborhood shopping district as being convenient."

From the perspective of transportation alone, the loss of parking made sense. Many curbside parking spaces were empty, and traffic was slow at some intersections because of left turns and other congestion. The solution might seem obvious: trade the unused parking for a smoother traffic flow. But if the goal was to redevelop the commercial strip—a process barely underway, with many new and still-fragile shops depending on drive-up customers—the calculation became more complicated. In such an environment, the importance of on-street parking is not only to accommodate as many cars as possible, but to create a general impression that *it's easy to shop here*. To many merchants, a healthy percentage of unused parking spaces may actually be a positive thing. Their subliminal message: Stop in now.

Because of the elimination of turn lanes and other changes in the design, the county was able to put most of the on-street parking spaces back into the construction plan for Lake Street. In the end, even with the addition of sidewalk bump-outs in a few places, only 16 parking spaces will be lost.

highway funding and its constraints

Not all the problems with the original redesign of Lake Street were the fault of the planning process, or of too little consultation between neighborhood developers and transportation planners. In fact, Hennepin County surely compares favorably with many other big metropolitan counties in its effort to apply road-improvement dollars in ways that support neighborhood revitalization. The problem is that, with some of those dollars, effort alone may be no match for the limitations posed by funding restrictions.

Roadway funding, like roadway planning, is based on professional and technical judgments that in most cases have little to do with neighborhood revitalization. Federal funds, derived from a tax on gasoline, can be especially inflexible in this way, because the political justification for the tax has always been that the revenue will be used to benefit the people who provide the money: drivers. In practice, that has been interpreted to mean that money can be spent only on what law and regulation call "highway purposes," and those purposes overwhelmingly concentrate on easing the flow of traffic. It is especially difficult to use these funds for improvements designed to serve or promote other modes of transportation. Separate funding for bicycle and pedestrian facilities and other amenities is available from the federal Transportation Enhancement Program, but that program is comparatively small and the competition is fierce.

It's true that some federal highway funds can be used for trees, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and some streetscaping, so long as those things are functionally related to a roadway project that is the main use of the money. Yet even that slight degree of flexibility is often narrowed by the time the money reaches state and local

agencies, most of whose rules and practices are set by people experienced in improving roads, not in building communities.

In Minnesota, state-aid rules allow for up to 5 percent of a project budget to be spent on landscaping and streetscaping. Here, as with federal funds, pedestrian and bicycle facilities can be included if they're integral to a roadway project. But the real restriction on these funds is not in the types of ancillary features for which they can be used, but in the standards that govern what kinds of roads can be built and what standards those roads must satisfy. State-aid standards specify how traffic must be forecast, through what year, and what LOS (for "level of service," a technical measure of flow) the new road must provide for that amount of projected traffic. Although it is possible to apply for waivers for some of these provisions, the process is neither easy nor sure to succeed.

In practice, this means that pedestrian enhancements and other non–"highway purposes" must be funded, at least in significant part, with local dollars or through special assessments. On Lake Street, that will happen at two levels. A basic level of streetscaping, tree planting, and sidewalk paving will be paid for by a combination of about 75 percent public funds [6] and 25 percent mandatory assessment of adjoining property owners. But at two intersections, where Lake meets Chicago and Bloomington avenues, the adjoining businesses have agreed to assess themselves further, to pay for better

sidewalks, a more comfortable bus shelter, decorative fences to screen off-street parking, and marketing touches like banners that hang from street lights. The additional assessments, which required the owners' unanimous consent, represent a strong pocket-book vote in favor of the extra improvements—a good measure of how important these factors are to the economics of an emerging commercial strip.

Still, the routine reliance on special assessments in such cases warrants further thought and discussion. Minneapolis, like many other cities, tends to levy these assessments according to uniform citywide rules whose purpose is to ensure fairness across all parts of the city. The basic (that is, non-voluntary) assessment on Lake Street will follow that standard formula. This approach may be fair, but it may not be wise in every case. Lake Street's economic growth has not been achieved with national coffeehouse and clothing chains, but with immigrant and first-time business owners subsisting from month to month. That is, in fact, the very reason Lake Street is an important economic development target for both government and philanthropy. It is at least reasonable to ask whether strict fairness to all businesses is the right principle to apply in cases like this. Might a disproportionate city commitment to the neighborhood and its commercial environment be well justified as a pump-priming investment?

"Lake Street's economic growth has not been achieved with national coffeehouse and clothing chains."

Tight municipal budgets make the issue difficult to raise at this point. And in time, the burden on Lake Street businesses may prove to be manageable. Still, the question remains important, even if not easily answered. As the consultants summed it up, "For marginal businesses, the assessment may mean the difference between success and failure—surely an outcome at odds with economic revitalization."

lessons and implications

As this is being written, the story of Lake Street's redesign is just reaching the end of the beginning. Construction on the newly revised plan for Phase One is set to begin in the 2005 construction season, and future phases are in various stages of planning. Though it may be too soon to draw firm conclusions from any of this, the experience of re-examining and partly renegotiating the initial plans for Lake Street has yielded some tentative lessons—or at least some impressions that warrant wider thought and discussion. The consultants who led most of that process offered the following four recommendations, which form a useful foundation for examining the Lake Street experience and thinking about how the worlds of community revitalization and roadway engineering can be brought into a more productive alliance in the future.

1. Understand the role and character of the street in the context of the broader community.

The fundamental problem running through the story of Lake Street's redesign is that transportation planners tended to understand traffic problems, and neighborhood representatives tended to understand economic and community problems. Both sides set out, in good faith, to solve the problems they understood. Each side, at certain points along the way, tended to diminish or distrust the concerns raised by the other side. In the end, of course, it was transportation professionals who controlled the dollars and the technical resources for the project. So, barring the intervention of outside, independent expertise, the desire for a "wider, faster" street was sure to prevail. Confronting that reality, some community representatives grew resentful and suspicious, feeling that their views had not been taken seriously. Yet none of this was a side effect of callousness or bad faith; it was a failure of understanding in both directions.

This lack of cross-communication was not just a matter of personal interaction. It had a technical element as well. A street, as the consultants later pointed out, may serve primarily as a commuter route through which most drivers pass end-to-end without wanting to stop, or it may serve for shorter trips in which drivers are moving among local streets, shops, and services. Each of those presents a different set of

demands and opportunities to be analyzed and balanced, and the complexity of those demands and opportunities is not easily captured in standard measurements of traffic volume and levels of service. The former scenario, in which traffic moves continuously across the whole road, presents a comparatively simple problem: how to speed traffic in and out. The question is, in that case, how many other roadway features will have to be sacrificed to make room for the cars. When much of the traffic is local, however, planners are faced with complex trade-offs among the many local users and their needs: turning, parking, looking for their destination, walking, and driving. To know which set of choices has to be made, it's first essential to understand the street and how it's used.

Streets also constitute an enormous investment of public dollars that should, by rights, serve as many other public purposes as possible, beyond moving people around. These include the neighborhood's and city's desire for economic revitalization, physical development, and social cohesion. Yet in the conventional world, where transportation and community development are alien cultures with little or no cross-fertilization, it is no one's job to reckon the costs and benefits of all these options in a single calculation. In fact, hardly anyone is even trained to do such a job.

It would seem, in concept, that the use of a Public Advisory Committee would be a good, conscientious way of bridging that divide. And that is, in fact, what both the county and the community organizations expected when the committee was convened. It probably would have been successful, too, had the problem been merely one of communication, rather than of fundamental training, experience, and expertise. As a person deeply involved in the advisory process put it:

"You had very committed members of the community investing a lot of volunteer time to be involved in this process, yet they really weren't allowed to make many meaningful decisions. And for the decisions they were asked to make, they didn't get sufficient information to judge and evaluate their options. They acted often as a rubber stamp to what the [county's] consultants gave them, because they usually weren't armed with solid information with which to question the official answers. Ostensibly the Public Advisory Committee was providing direction, but when you looked at what was going on, all they could do was say OK. If anybody did have a question, it was usually more of an intuition that something could be different or ought to be looked at differently. They didn't have enough knowledge to ask meaningful questions or to rebut someone who told them 'this can't be done.' "

" You had very committed members of the community investing a lot of volunteer time to be involved in this process. "

One side effect of this gap in understanding was that roadway planners often viewed the community's concerns as wish lists: optional or ideal improvements that unfortunately had to be weighed against the immovable necessities of the traffic calculations. Only when outside experts entered the process was there a way of looking at the calculations differently and conducting them with real community dynamics in mind. And the result was a new approach, at least on the margins, to such questions as on-street parking, short-distance driving, and ways of calculating acceptable traffic flow.

2. Challenge your assumptions.

It is no oversimplification to say that one factor, by itself, caused most of the discrepancy between the neighborhood-development goals of the Framework Plan and the later redesign of Lake Street. That factor was the effort to achieve publicly mandated "levels of service" for traffic flow—that is, the use of traditional methods to forecast traffic volume, congestion, and delay at every intersection and then to design a road that would allow for the smoothest projected flow. This one factor, a standard feature of roadway planning practically everywhere in the United States, led to a chain of related decisions that, little by little, eroded many of the community's hopes for parking, sidewalk amenities, biking, and pedestrian convenience. If a projected amount of traffic had to flow, at every intersection and at all hours, according to standard guidelines, then these other factors would have to be "sacrificed" for wider lanes, turn lanes, and other provisions for swifter traffic.

> "Taking a different approach to projecting traffic flow or calculating lane widths instantly opened up options."

When those assumptions were viewed from outside the conventional procedures of traffic planning, there were many reasons to be skeptical. Taking a different approach to projecting traffic flow or calculating lane widths, as described earlier, instantly opened up options for restoring curbside parking or widening sidewalks. Those changes in approach, though unconventional, were both professionally and legally acceptable. They just weren't the norm.

Other limiting assumptions had less to do with professional tradition and more to do with local history. These were, in some cases, much harder to alter. One example was the early assumption that neighborhood traffic had to be concentrated on Lake Street and not allowed to flow onto other streets in the neighborhood. As the consultants put it:

"This assumption resulted in designs for a 'wider, faster' Lake Street that diminished the pedestrian character and community role of the street. Based on a lengthy history of neighborhood traffic skirmishes in south Minneapolis, this assumption was never revisited, only designed around. As a result, design alternatives that could have significantly improved pedestrian conditions on Lake Street were discarded, since they couldn't accommodate the projected traffic demand."

Project for Public Spaces had identified the crippling influence of this assumption early on. "This is essentially a suburban notion," PPS observers wrote, "where cul-de-sacs feed onto 'collector' roads, which feed onto 'arterials,' which carry traffic to the highway." [7] In the suburban model, it is presumed that drivers do not want to visit other parts of their neighborhood; they want to leave the neighborhood entirely, rely on high-volume highways and thoroughfares, and return hours later. That is why suburban neighborhoods tend to be single-use environments.

That suburban orthodoxy is by now so well entrenched in modern planning that a casual observer might hardly notice how poorly it fits a mixed-use urban neighborhood.

3. Street reconstruction funds can work at cross purposes to neighborhood revitalization.

The previous section of this report described some (but far from all) of the constraints that multiple funding sources impose on roadway planning. The funding streams, like the routine assumptions of highway professionals, tend to impose uniform ideas from place to place, perhaps too heavily influenced by suburban practices and predilections. The rules often make an especially poor fit for the particular needs and opportunities of an older urban neighborhood. "In struggling communities," the McKnight consultants concisely observed, these one-size-fits-all restrictions "can mean the difference between building a generic street or a unique street, and between economic success or failure."

This is not an obstacle that can somehow be managed away. Barring a significant infusion of unrestricted local dollars, some roadway features that community developers would consider highly valuable may be simply unaffordable. That is a constraint that community participants need to be made aware of early in their deliberations. But it is also a problem that might be solved, at least in some respects, with enough advance thought and creativity.

Some funding rules can be waived, given sufficient preparation and a strong enough argument. In other cases, it may be possible (though rarely simple) to tap other

sources of funding to supplement state and federal dollars. The most commonly suggested solution—funding enhancements with special assessments imposed on property owners along the roadway—is not always realistic or productive. In most cases, the challenge is to identify, early in the process, those desirable features that can be paid for with public funding streams, even if through waivers, and then determine how much else could realistically be achieved with other fundraising.

4. The design process must be grounded in the community's goals, and these goals must be represented by a strong community voice.

This item returns us to the issues raised in point No. 1: the relationship between the street and the wider community's needs. But in this case, the issue is not one of developing shared values between street planners and community developers; instead, it's a question of the kind of organization and staffing that can make such values more likely to emerge. In simplest terms, the process of community consultation and goal-setting demands that the community be informed and represented by expert, independent advisers. A strong community voice, in this context, is necessarily a well-informed and authoritative voice. That did not happen, despite all the best intentions, in the initial Lake Street exercise.

The most obvious implication is that planning consultants who specialize in both community development and roadway design should be retained to help community leaders evaluate their options and render truly independent judgments on government proposals. The reason for this is not at all adversarial; the point is to encourage collegiality, not confrontation. It's worth noting that the lack of true understanding and independence in the Lake Street public-participation process actually *led* to adversarial feelings and distrust—precisely because community representatives felt that they were unable to participate on an

> "Independent advice could encourage a real exchange of ideas."

equal footing with county experts. Independent advice could encourage a real exchange of ideas by eliminating the sense of helplessness among people with no background in planning and engineering.

A second, related point is that individual community representatives are valuable participants in this process, but community *organizations*—those with the staff and resources to spend time on planning exercises need to be a more active part of the deliberations than they were on Lake Street. The role of community development organizations generally is to combine grassroots participation with full-time, expert leadership. They cultivate working relationships with government agencies, develop a level of expertise on the neighborhood's economy, and carry out projects whose goals are closely related to those of roadway design to improve the neighborhood's quality of life. Admittedly, not every neighborhood has organizations that can realistically fill this role. But when they do, those organizations should normally be prominent actors in the public review of street planning and construction.

conclusion: a case in progress

It would be tempting, but wrong, to read the unfinished story of the Lake Street redesign as some kind of clash between frustrated community leaders and intransigent planners. Many elements of this case—and virtually all the motives behind the events—are commendable and worth repeating. Hennepin County's fundamental impulse in planning an improved Lake Street was to make the improvements serve the wider community. That vision was eroded a bit over time, mostly because of forces that impinge on roadway planning exercises everywhere. But it was the right impulse, and by national standards a visionary one.

Furthermore, the response of county planners to McKnight's ninth-inning entry into the game was surprisingly flexible. It would be easy, on procedural grounds alone, to imagine a wall of objections and resentment greeting any attempt to revise plans that had been so long in the making—especially if the revisions came from an institution with no formal public mandate to rule on street plans. Yet instead of objecting to the Foundation's efforts, the county conferred with the consultants candidly and responsively, and the result was a set of modifications that both sides considered an improvement. The final plans probably fall short of what could have been achieved through a different process, but they yield several benefits for the community that wouldn't have been achieved otherwise. And they create an opportunity for reflection on how later processes might be improved.

That reflection is now underway. As this is written, the detailed plan revisions for Lake Street's Phase One are being reviewed. Discussion of later phases is still in progress, but now is the time for a more deliberate effort to broaden that discussion and improve its results. Whether the improvements will be sufficient, or whether they will work at all, is at this point impossible to say. But it is now clear that, at a minimum, a 1.8-mile stretch of Lake Street will be better—both as a road and as an element of neighborhood development—than it would have been otherwise. That is a rare and important accomplishment, not just for Hennepin County and Minneapolis, but for the field of community development generally, where street planning remains part of a remote frontier whose role in overall neighborhood improvement has yet to be fully explored.

footnotes // credits :

#1 p.13 By way of contrast, note that even the most expert for-profit developers tend to prefer working on undeveloped green space, where existing infrastructure and competing political interests are less likely to get in their way. The preference for vacant, sometimes unincorporated areas is a reasonable business calculation about how much harder and riskier it is to develop existing communities than to build new ones. That is one reason why, to this day, government, philanthropy, and community organizations, not the real estate development industry, remain the driving forces behind the redevelopment of many older, central-city neighborhoods.

#2 p.17 Lake Street became a county road in 1993, at which point the City of Minneapolis lost most of its control over planning, design, and construction, though the city retains some political influence.

#3 p.18 This report draws heavily from an earlier paper, "Lessons Learned from Lake Street," by three consultants engaged by The McKnight Foundation during most of the events described here: Fred Dock, P.E., of Meyer, Mohaddes, Inc.; Stacy Becker of Becker Consulting; and Charleen Zimmer of Zan Associates. That paper, with its clear, detailed analysis of the engineering, planning, and development considerations in the Lake Street redesign, is an indispensable complement to this case study. Because the influence of the consultants' thought and writing runs through this entire report, quotations from their work are acknowledged in the text but not separately footnoted. "Lessons Learned from Lake Street" is available from The McKnight Foundation.

#4 p.20 For more about PPS, see the website at www.pps.org.

#5 p.34 "Lake Street Reconstruction: A Review and a Look to the Future for Street Design in Minneapolis," a joint report by the Project for Public Spaces and Glatting Jackson Transportation Consultants, published by The McKnight Foundation, July 2004, p. 13.

#6 p.37 Half of the public money will come from a Hennepin County fund for roadside enhancement and preservation (REPP) and the other half from federal TEA-21 transportation enhancement dollars.

#7 p.43 "Lake Street Reconstruction," p. 16.

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